

2016 Idaho Winery to Watch: Vizcaya Winery

By Eric Degerman, March 14, 2016



Kay and Larry Hansen, owners of Vizcaya Winery, hold a bottle of their 2014 silver medal Albariño and a 2011 double gold medal, best of class Tempranillo wine in their tasting room at 8987 S.

Greenhurst Road in Kuna, Idaho.

DARIN OSWALD— Idaho Statesman

KUNA, Idaho — Tempranillo has emerged as a hot grape around the Pacific Northwest, and Vizcaya Winery is keeping the trend rolling in Idaho's Snake River Valley.

Last year, Larry and Kay Hansen used fruit from their Windy Ridge Vineyard to win a double gold medal at the Idaho Wine Competition with their 2011 Tempranillo, which means the judges' vote was not a consensus but unanimous. In 2014, the Hansens' winemaker, Mike Crowley, earned a double gold for Tempranillo at the state competition under his Syringa brand.

Same vineyard. Same vintage. Different judges. Same result. Indeed, the early-ripening grape native to the Rioja region of Spain is a

good fit in the Snake River Valley of Idaho. And the wines pair naturally with cuisine found in Basque households throughout Boise, one of the culture's largest communities outside of the Iberian Peninsula.

"The spark for having a winery of our own was the results other winemakers achieved with our fruit," Larry said. "We're pretty pleased with how our vineyards are doing, but even more so with the wines."

That realized potential defines Vizcaya as the 2016 Idaho Winery to Watch. Considering their backgrounds, it's natural that the Hansens researched their entry into the Idaho wine industry. Interest in their signature grape, however, began rather simply.

"We drank a lot of Spanish Tempranillo," Kay said. "This was back in early 2000s when it was pretty much an unknown out here."

Although inexperienced when it came to viticulture, the Hansens grew up with backgrounds that translate. And their combined success in business made Windy Ridge Vineyard and now Vizcaya Estate Vineyard possible.

Kay grew up on a family farm in Meridian, class of '76, well before it morphed into the sprawling bedroom community of Boise. She worked in her parents' restaurant and bar, graduated from Boise State, then spent 34 years at Hewlett-Packard. She retired as a financial analyst, and Vizcaya benefits from her full-time focus.

Larry, 56, born and raised in Spokane, spent five years on a wheat ranch before joining H-P out of college. He met Kay on the job and worked in research/development, specializing in magnetic recording, before accepting an H-P buyout in 2012. Before long, he rejoined the tech industry, now with Micron.



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"I've always been drawn to a country lifestyle even though I've spent 30-plus years in a cubicle," he chuckled.

In 2001, the Hansens bought 6 acres in Meridian specifically to plant a vineyard. After the purchase, they reached out to Larry's nephew, Damon LaLonde, now one of the top viticulturalists in Washington's Columbia Valley. He helped them with test plots and suggested Tempranillo, so in 2004 they planted clones 1 and 2 on Windy Ridge. Two years later, they added three more clones of Tempranillo as well as Cabernet Sauvignon, Malbec and Pinot Gris.

They held back some fruit from wineries in 2011 and worked with Crowley on the first Vizcaya wines. In anticipation of opening a winery and tasting room, the Hansens purchased 9 acres in a neighboring county because of zoning restrictions.

The new site, home to Vizcaya Estate Vineyard, also allowed the Hansens to expand upon the Spanish concept in 2014 by planting Albariño and Cabernet Sauvignon. That vintage, they purchased Albariño from Naches Heights Vineyard in Washington, and Crowley turned that juice into a silver medal at last year's Idaho Wine Competition. They expect to plant Malbec, Pinot Gris and a few Port varieties, including more Tempranillo, at the Vizcaya site.

Unfortunately, the Hansens' plantings have suffered freeze events along with many of the Snake River Valley vineyards in recent years. They described the 2015 vintage in particular as "devastating."

"That's part of life here in Idaho," Larry said. "Growing grapes in Idaho is not like growing grapes in Washington or California. If you are a vineyard owner here, you have to be able to roll with the punches."

Crowley said, "The fruit — when they are able to grow it — is great. They have one of the better-managed vineyards in the state, even though it's small."

Crop losses and the lack of a retail presence prevented the Hansens from ramping up production. This year, Vizcaya will release less than 300 cases of wine — including 100 cases of 2012 Estate Tempranillo.

Last October, however, Vizcaya opened its tasting room. The Hansens also plan to create a 3,000-square-foot production facility nearby, which would make the winemaking easier for Crowley.

"They are pretty good people to work with," Crowley said. "They definitely are passionate and are really focused on trying to produce the best fruit they can, given the conditions. It's an amazing tasting room, too. It's not a big one, but it's one of the nicest in Idaho."

